

SERMON for July 11, 2021

**Ephesians: “Who am I? I am chosen!”** Ephesians 1:3–14

How would you complete the statement: “I am \_\_\_\_\_”? The world tries to answer this question for us. It attempts to fill in the blank. “I am [my profession]” is a common answer. When someone asks us, “Hi, I’m so in so, who are you?” We respond, “Hi, I’m Scott, I’m a pastor.” Or “I’m a teacher,” “I’m a nurse,” “I’m a farmer,” “I’m a homemaker.” Another common answer is something we enjoy doing: “I’m an avid photographer,” “I’m a historian.”

The letter to the Ephesians is a book about identity. This letter addresses the question: “Who am I?” St Paul, in writing to the church in Ephesus (modern day Turkey), tells us how to complete the statement: “I am \_\_\_\_\_.” Surprisingly our identity has nothing to do with anything inside ourselves. It has nothing to do with what we do. Instead, who we are has everything to do with what God does, and what God says.

As a child, I would dread recess. We would often play team sports and we would select two captains who would choose their team one by one. The first captain would say, “I’ll take Bob.” The second would say, “I choose Mark.” And so on. I would often be picked near the end. It didn’t feel very nice to be ignored, overlooked, and not wanted. Have you experienced these feelings? This can lead us to ask, “Am I worthless? Where do I get my worth? Who am I?”

Paul begins his letter by telling us we are chosen. ‘God chose us to belong to Christ before the world was created.’ (Ephesians 1:4). You are chosen by God. To help us understand what this means, let’s put on our detective hats and ask: who? what? when? why? how?

## **Who did God choose?**

We tend to think about ourselves first, but it's important to remember that, firstly, God chose Jesus. The voice from the cloud at Jesus' transfiguration says, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." (Luke 9:35). Jesus has the title "Christ" or "Messiah" which means "Chosen One." Jesus is God's firstborn son. Secondly, God chose you plural, you collective, you the church. It's like God is the team captain, he deliberately points at you, and says, "I choose you." God gathers us together as his team. Lastly, God chose you individually. A team always consists of individuals. God unites us individuals into a team — the church, the body of Christ.

## **What does it mean to be chosen?**

Being chosen means you are made part of God's family. St Paul uses the word picture of adoption. Through adoption, God becomes your heavenly Father, Jesus your brother, and the Holy Spirit is the seal or mark guaranteeing your adoption.

Being chosen by God means being adopted into his family. As newly adopted sons and daughters of God, he controls our life now. This may sound oppressive to our modern ears, but it's not meant to be.

Being chosen means you are given a new name — God's name. The word 'chosen' literally means 'to name.' God is saying, "I name you as my child and heir." Being chosen means you inherit the family property — the spiritual blessings, heaven itself becomes yours. 'God raised us up with Christ. He has seated us with him in his heavenly kingdom because we belong to Christ Jesus.' (Ephesians 2:6).

Being chosen means you have a new home, a new family, a new future, a place to belong.

## **When were you chosen?**

We might think we were chosen when we made some kind of decision to follow Jesus. Or we might think we were chosen at our baptism. Or we might even say God chose us when we were born. But no! St Paul writes, 'God chose us before the world was created.' (Ephesians 1:4). God has chosen you since before time itself! God is not some chess player responding to his opponent after each move. God has the whole game in hand. Before the first piece was even moved, God knew everything that would happen until now, and the next step, and the next, all the way until the game ends with his victory.

## **Why were you chosen?**

Let's go back to the example of the team captain in sports class. If you were the captain, how would you choose your team? You might look for the tallest or fastest or strongest. But God is not that sort of captain. And we are not those sort of players anyway. 'The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.' (Deuteronomy 7:7). God doesn't choose you because you're the biggest or best. There is nothing you did, no quality that makes you worthy to be chosen.

Elsewhere St Paul writes that God chooses the foolish, the weak, the lowly (1 Corinthians 1:27–29). And I think even that's being generous. I think it is more like you are sitting on the bench with a broken leg, and yet Captain Jesus points his finger at you and says, "I choose you." Who would pick the player with the broken leg?! Foolishness! Yet God does. Why? That's the type of person he is. He loves you. 'As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.' (Psalm 103:13). He did it because of what Jesus has done. He did it to bring praise to his glory.

### **How were you chosen?**

St Paul says, 'Through his blood our sins have been forgiven.' (Ephesians 1:7). The how is accomplished through the blood of Jesus. Jesus' death is the payment for your adoption. God chose us because of and through what Jesus has done on the cross.

### **What does all this mean?**

Tomorrow when you wake up, what difference will it make to know that God has chosen you? Firstly, you have security. No matter what happens tomorrow or the day after or the day after, nothing can change the fact that God has chosen you. You are his adopted child. Nothing you do can change this status. Nothing anyone else does can change who you are. You are and will always be chosen in Christ.

Secondly, it means your old life is gone, your old father has no authority over you anymore. That's done with. You belong to a new family now. This means you are in training to act like your new family. To become like God, like Christ. This is why St Paul says, 'He chose us to be holy and without blame in his eyes.' (Ephesians 1:4). You are being made holy and blameless, like your adopted father. Amen.